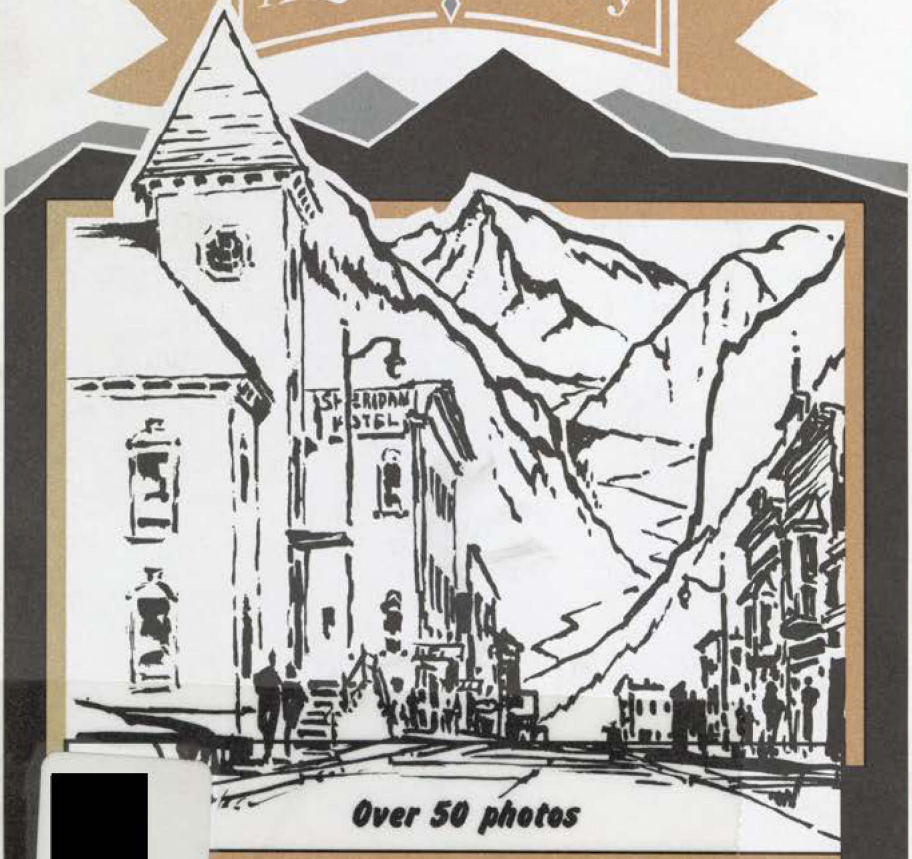
TELLURIDE

A Quick History



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A Quick History of

TELLURIDE

"Boom - Bust - Boom Again Town"

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Weber, Rose.
A quick history of Tellurid
: "boom-bust-boom again

by

Rose Weber

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THE FALLS OF SAN MIGUEL

Where cold crag-shadows fall
Across the trestled flumes
And trams of Telluride,
Flash three perpetual
Suspended water plumes,
Three banners that abide.

Cornet and *Bridal Veil*
Over ledge and steep;
Sheer by the Tomboy trail
Ingram's wild leap!

The loosed snow-thunder's roar,
Swift as a bolt of thought,
Strikes grandly and is done;
But these doomed waters pour
Perilous, ceasing not
Under the stars and sun.

Foam-spray and diamond-hail,
Harps on the steep;
Cornet and *Bridal Veil,*
Ingram's wild leap!

From *Crags*, copyright (1938) by Clifford J. Laube, a book which drew wide acclaim from the critics.

Cover by Richard Wagner, Telluride's nationally known artist. Mr. Wagner's paintings may be seen in the collections of the Library of Congress, Denver Art Museum, University of Colorado, Dartmouth College, Rochester Museum and others. His work has been shown at The Museum of Modern Art, Pennsylvania Academy, Carnegie Institute, Joslyn Art Museum, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, and many more.

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Rose Weber

AN INTRODUCTION

The story of Colorado's rise to statehood and to its continued place of prominence in what the Denver Post chooses to call "the Rocky Mountain Empire" is replete with the sagas of once rip-roaring but now less boisterous mining camps. Mere mention of such rowdy boom towns as Central City, Leadville, Cripple Creek, Aspen, Creede, Rico, Silverton and Ouray is enough to conjure unforgotten legends.

Telluride, less celebrated because perhaps less boastful of its gaudy past, is what this vivid book is all about. Whatever the hell-to-leather ingredients were that went into those other camps, Telluride had them in equal if not greater degree; and their aura still to some extent remains. Colorado still has scores of little Leadvilles and smaller Creedes clinging to its rocky shelves and shoulders. Many of these were once important ore producers. Most of them, like most of their forerunners, today bear little semblance of their former bustle and bravado.

But Telluride is something else again. There is only one Telluride. It is in a class by itself. For Telluride is still the hard-rock miner's mining camp — a town that is not content with masquerade of its storied past but manages to keep its great Idarado and other mines going; a town with an unbroken continuity of silver and gold production since the platting in 1878 of its site beside the headwaters of the snow-fed river San Miguel. Among those of Colorado's gold-silver-copper-lead-zinc camps not yet metamorphosed into tourist meccas, Telluride is rated as perhaps the toughest and the hardiest of them all.

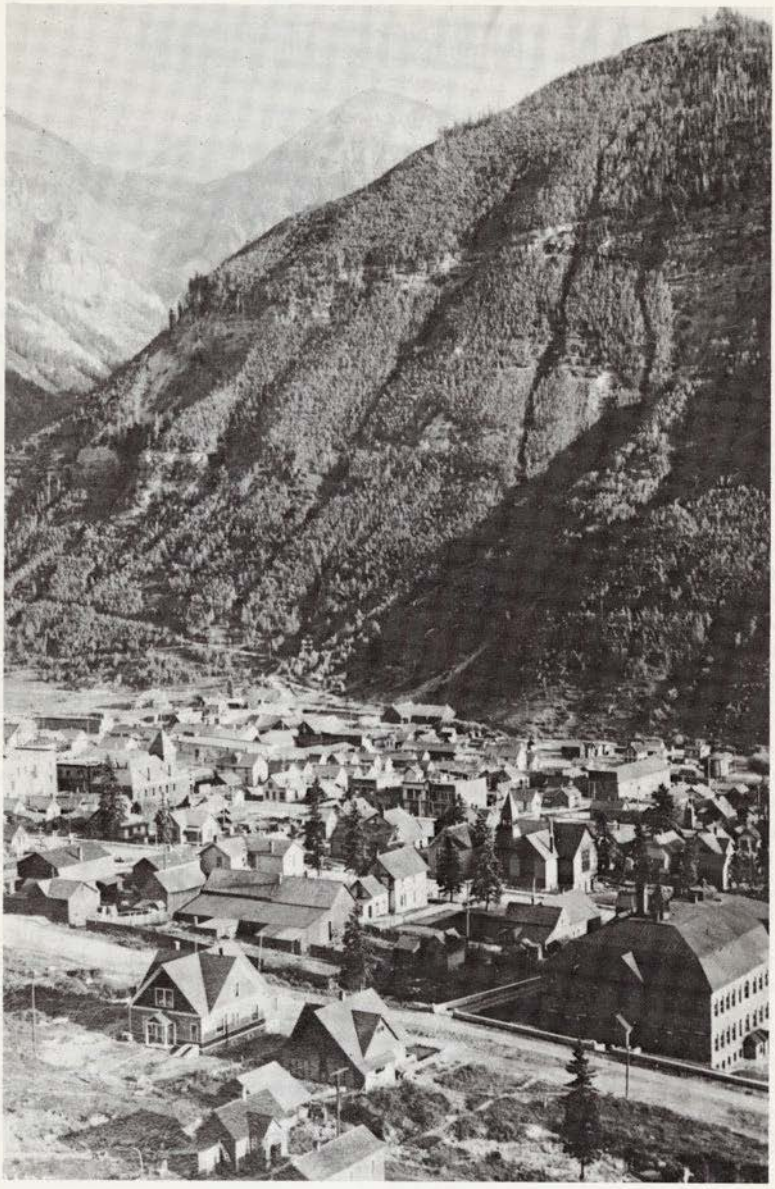
To have made one's home in Telluride, or tarried there long enough to imbibe the breath-taking beauty of its crag-rimmed setting at a street-level altitude of roughly 9,000 feet, or caught the wafted odor of wild columbines perched amid spray from the town's three fabulous waterfalls, is to have come under the spell of an enchantment never to be shaken off. My own passion for Telluride stems from the fact that I was born there in 1891. Later, when my parents Adolph and Alma settled in Rico and I grew up to become a printer's devil, then a youthful legislator and finally a newspaper man and author, I never could get over to Telluride as often as I wished.

When recently my author-sister Flora M. Good, who spent much of her youth in Telluride, wrote from Colorado Springs to tell me that Leland Feitz of Little London Press was putting together a book about Telluride, my pulses quickened. Having read his compact and gripping Cripple Creek story, brought out in 1967 and now in its seventh or eighth printing, I knew that the too-long-neglected annals of Telluride had at last found a fitting compiler. Whether Mr. Feitz himself assumes the author's role or whether, as in this instance he entrusts that role to another writer superbly worthy of it, the chronicles he produces combine carefully researched fact with authentic flavor, and both with exciting photographic documentation. In this beautifully written book he has given us once again not only the gear and the glamour of a great mining camp but also a solid nugget of Colorado history.

Clifford J. Laube

Ozone Park, N.Y. 11417
Dec. 14, 1973

Mr. Laube retired in 1953 after twenty-four years with the *New York Times*. He was Day National News editor.



Looking south across turn-of-the-century Telluride. (Homer Reid Collection)

PROFILE OF A MINING TOWN

In southwestern Colorado, the rugged San Juan Mountains rise high and majestic, their peaks proudly guarding their riches. It was here, at the headwaters of the San Miguel River, that the siren song of silver drew the first prospectors in the 1870's, and the little mining camp of Columbia began its growth. Columbia, unlike most western mining towns, did not "spring up," but mainly because of its isolation, developed gradually.

In 1878 an 80-acre townsite was laid out and incorporated 8,745 feet above sea level, and J. W. Carpenter was elected the first mayor. San Miguel County was established in 1883, and Columbia became the county seat.

Then at the request of postal officials, who were having trouble with mail being misdirected to a California town of the same name, Columbia's name was changed to Telluride in 1887. Since tellurium is an element often found combined with precious metals, forming Telluride ore, the name "Telluride" seemed an appropriate choice.

With the coming of the railroad in 1890, the little camp began to flourish, and fortune hunters thronged into the area to join the earlier prospectors. Mine laborers, lawyers, geologists, mule skinners, assayers, merchants, preachers, prospectors, and prostitutes multiplied, and the town really began to hum. The silver-veined mountains rang with the clangor of ore cars and machinery working the mines high above Telluride, and prosperity seemed assured.

Life went on in this progressive way until 1893, when the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act reduced the price of silver from $1.29 to 50¢ an ounce. Telluride reeled under this disaster. With mines closed down, and money scarce, the population dwindled rapidly, and Telluride narrowly missed extinction.

But fortune smiled on the nearly deserted camp when the mines obligingly began to yield gold instead of silver, so faltering Telluride soon rallied, and was on its way again.

Gold mining has slowed down in recent times, but mining of base metals continues. Lately the town has been discovered by the skier, jeepster, hiker, sportsman, and rock hound. With tourists replacing prospectors, it seems safe to predict that another boom is on the way.

This pictorial history gives a glimpse of the ups and downs, the struggles and the triumphs, and the events that molded the boom-bust-and-boom-again town of Telluride.

An 1886 view of the Sheridan Mine in Marshall Basin in the San Juan Mountains. The first discovery was made here. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

PAY DIRT

In 1875 John Fallon, a prospector, hit pay dirt in Marshall Basin, high in the mountains five miles northeast of present Telluride. His claim was rich in zinc, lead, copper, iron, silver, and gold. Although there had been some placer mining along the San Miguel River earlier, Fallon's Sheridan Mine discovery marked the beginning of a $300,000,000 mining development.

Instead of developing the mine himself, Fallon first leased, and later sold the Sheridan for $40,000. The property was sold by successive owners at increasingly higher prices. In 1883 the Sheridan was bought by a group of English and Scottish bankers living in Shanghai, who gradually acquired other nearby mines, including the Mendota, the Union, and the Smuggler.

The Smuggler deserves its name. In 1876 J. B. Ingram, prospecting in the area, discovered that the adjacent Sheridan and Union claims overlapped the legal limits by around 500 feet. Taking advantage of this happy oversight, he staked a claim on the area between the two mines, called it the Smuggler, and immediately began to profit from the venture. The Smuggler's rich ore ran 800 ounces of silver and 18 ounces of gold to a ton. Later the Smuggler consolidated with the Union. Among the gold veins found in this mine was one a mile long! By 1900, more than 35 miles of tunnels had been excavated in the Smuggler-Union Mine alone.

Additional mines were discovered. The Liberty Bell, Tomboy, Alta, Hidden Treasure, Cimmaron, Bullion, Pandora, Argentine, Gold King, and Cleveland were all lucrative mines. The Liberty Bell, Tomboy, and Smuggler-Union proved to be the major producers.

The Liberty Bell was discovered in 1876 by W. L. Cornett, on the western front of the San Juan Mountains, two miles north of Telluride. The mine remained relatively undeveloped until it was taken over by the Liberty Bell Gold Mining Company in 1897, and during the next twenty years, over

$16,000,000 was realized from this operation. The company built a mill along the San Miguel river to process its ore.

In 1880, the Tomboy strike was made 3,000 feet above Telluride, in Savage Basin, just beyond Marshall Basin. It prospered from the beginning, becoming one of the richest mines in North America. In 1897 it was sold to Rothchild's of London for $2,000,000. The Tomboy continued in operation until 1928.

In the early days of their development, these mines were handicapped by snowslides and blizzards which closed the trails, making it impossible to work the mines for six months out of the year.

The huge Pandora Mill, located at the headwaters of the San Miguel River, two miles east of Telluride, was bought by the Shanghai syndicate in 1888. This concentration mill was enlarged to treat ore from the Marshall Basin property. A 6,700 foot aerial tramway brought ore down from the Smuggler-Union at the rate of 300 to 400 tons a day, and also transported supplies and men in its high swinging buckets. A little settlement called Newport grew up there in 1876, which was later named Pandora. The Idarado Mill now occupies this site.

When the 1893 silver crash brought an abrupt halt to silver mining, the once teeming streets of Telluride lay in neglect and desolation. The few people who chose to remain in the area eked out a bare living by salvaging small amounts of gold from the mine dumps. The town limped on for five years, until gold was found in the mines in sufficient quantities to make mining profitable again.

Like a magnet gathering iron filings, Telluride drew its scattered population together, and the gold boom was on. Construction resumed, the dull thud of the stamp mills was again heard in the valley, and the revived town became known as "The City of Gold."

The boom continued for a few years, but slowed down considerably when the miners struck for higher wages in 1901.

Again in 1903, a second strike further crippled the industry. Gold deposits were waning, and mining for gold became less profitable as time went on. However, the area was rich in other minerals, and copper, lead, and zinc have been mined there continuously. San Miguel County, during 1950 and 1953, was, in fact, Colorado's top ranking mineral producing area.

Multi-level tunnels run completely through the mountains, from the Telluride side to various points along the Million Dollar Highway between Ouray and Silverton. An impressive total of 350 miles of mine tunnels now probe deep within the mountains around Telluride.

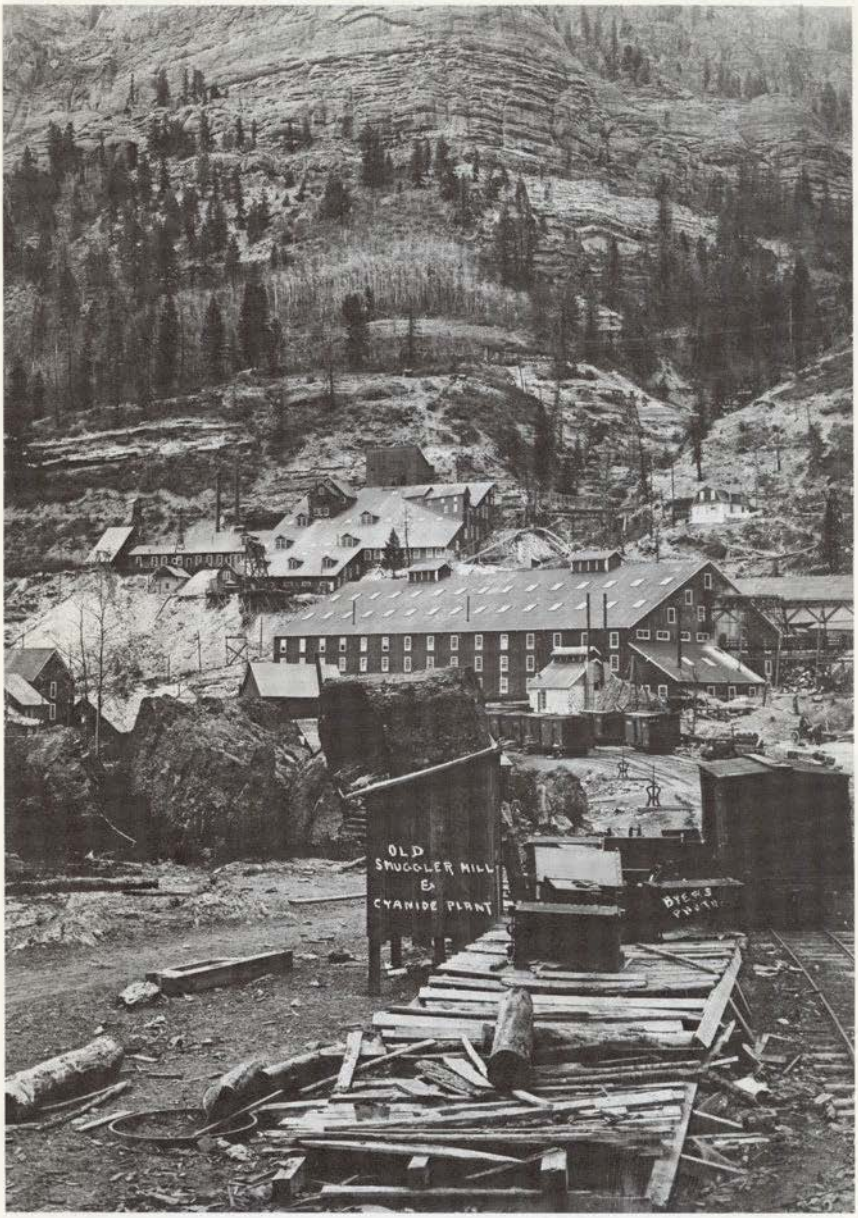
The ore produced contained small amounts of gold and silver, with the main metals being zinc, lead, and copper. As late as 1973, the company milled 126,000 tons of ore, and employed 365 people.

Because of its important contributions to early day mining, Telluride was made a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of Interior in 1964.

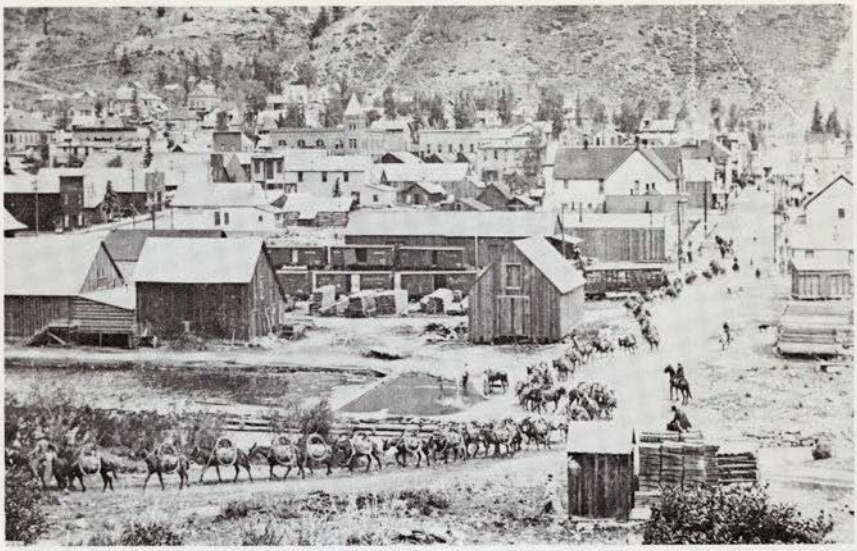
The Smuggler-Union Mine, high in the San Juans, was one of the richest producers in the district. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

Japan and Tomboy Mines, located in Savage Basin in San Juan Mountains east of Telluride. Arrow indicates 13,000 foot Imogene Pass. (Flora Good Collection)

The Alta Mine, 11,500 feet above sea level, between Telluride and Ophir. Photo taken before 1912. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)



The Smuggler Mill received 300 to 400 tons of ore a day via a 6,700 foot tram from the Smuggler-Union Mine. (Flora Good Collection)



Fifty two mules carry 4,000 feet of continuous cable to the Nellie Mine. (Homer Reid Collection)

Before cable trams were used, mule trains, loaded with ore, plodded the steep trails from Nellie Mine, around 10,600 feet above sea level. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

Telluride was awakened every morning by the racket of burros heading for the mines. Over 1,000 pack animals were available to transport ore, men and supplies. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

Mule drawn covered wagons hauled supplies up to the mines above timberline, and returned loaded with ore. 1884 photo. (Homer Reid Collection)

Party goers from Telluride often made the nearly vertical five mile trip to the Tomboy Boardinghouse to attend gala affairs. (Homer Reid Collection)

Interior of a Telluride mine. Around 1,200 miners worked in mines like this one in the early 1900's. (Flora Good Collection)

THE TOWN WITHOUT A BELLYACHE

Between 1880 and 1890, Telluride began to shed its "tent-and-cabin" image, and emerged as a city.

In 1881, two newspapers, **The Journal** and **The Examiner**, began publication, and a school district was organized. Classes were held in a private home, with a total enrollment of thirty seven students.

By the following year, Colorado Avenue was lined with permanent buildings. There were two grocery stores, one hardware store, a barber shop, a stage office with the only telephone in town, two hotels, (The Woods and the American House), two livery stables, a drug store, a clothing store, and more than the usual number of saloons and gambling halls. County and circuit court were held in a room above Jim Hurley's saloon. The first school building went up that year, a two room affair that was later added onto, and is now used as Telluride's City Hall. Around this time, too, George Andrus donated the grounds for Telluride's beautiful Lone Tree Cemetery, which lies on a gently sloping grassy knoll at the east edge of the city. Ironically, the first grave opened there was for Andrus' two year old son.

Churches, too, began to appear on the scene. The Congregational Church, constructed in 1884, was the first, followed by St. Patrick's Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, and the Christian Science Church. Later many other churches of various denominations were completed.

Before any of these houses of worship had been built, religious services were held in Jim Hurley's corner saloon, presided over by Parson Hogg, who came over Ophir Pass from Silverton every Sunday. A gambler, pressed into service to take up the collection, was not above prodding reluctant contributors into temporary generosity with a few irreverent, but persuasive remarks. When the saloon reopened after the service, the parson often made a further attempt to add to church funds by buying a stack of chips with the collection money.

San Miguel County was established in 1883, and the county courthouse was constructed in 1887. Besides the usual county business, the brick building served as a location for dances, literary meetings, and a variety of community affairs. In 1895 a permanent eight room schoolhouse replaced the original structure.

The town continued to boom. Cattle and sheep ranches and farms began to blossom in the mesa country west of Telluride. Prosperity and rapid growth were the order of the day, and the slogan, "The Town Without A Belly Ache," was adopted by local boosters to indicate the city's healthy economy.

By the late 1800's, business houses increased to ninety, including two banks. Other new businesses included drug stores, boot and shoe stores, blacksmith shops, jewelry stores, a millinery store, a confectionary shop, a furniture store, photo galleries, a couple of planing mills, and a brewery.

At one time Telluride supported 26 saloons and four dance halls. Along Pacific Avenue, a block below and parallel to Colorado Avenue, were the parlor houses and cribs, 26 in all. The most popular, the Pick and Gad, was a large brick structure, just off Pacific on Pine. Other bordellos were the Gold Belt, Silver Bell, Cozy Corner, The Whitehouse, and the Senate. One hundred and seventy five "ladies of the night" were employed in Telluride's red light district. Two colorful "madams," remembered more for their names than their professions, were Diamond Tooth Leona and Jew Fanny.

The New Sheridan Hotel, built in 1895, was the pride of Telluride. The three story building's cavernous, balconied interior more than made up for its ordinary facade. It rivaled Denver's Brown Palace in cuisine and service. Its menu included vichyssoise, fresh strawberries, seafood, possum and planked steak, and its well stocked cellar stored an unusual variety of excellent wines. The saloon sported walls covered with calfskin, a cherrywood bar imported from Austria with a mirror from Paris, and beaded glass windows. Behind the imposing bar was the Continental Room, with sixteen velvet curtained booths, each equipped with phone plugs, so diners,

free of hovering waiters, could call for service only when desired.

Bulkeley Wells, Telluride's man-about-town, often entertained at the Sheridan. Elaborate costumes were ordered from Chicago for the lavish masquerade balls he gave there honoring his close friend, Mrs. Crawford Hill, the Denver socialite.

William Jennings Bryan, Lillian Gish, and Sarah Bernhardt were among the celebrity guests who enjoyed the plush hospitality of the Sheridan. The famous "Cross of Gold" speech was delivered by Bryan from a platform erected in front of the Sheridan at the 1903 Fourth of July celebration.

The Sheridan Opera House was built next door to the hotel in 1914. A jewel of a theater, it seated 200 people, and boasted an artistic Venetian scene painted on its roll curtain. Lillian Russell was one of the famed stage talents to perform there. The opera house also doubled as a dance hall. It is still doing duty as a motion picture theater.

Almost every nationality was represented in Telluride. Men from Finland, Sweden, the Cornwall area of England, France, Ireland, Germany, and Italy gravitated to the district to work in the mines or go into business. There were two Chinese businessmen, one the proprietor of a laundry, the other manager of a general store. A sign in front of his store proclaimed the variety of its wares:

"Silks, Slippers, Candy, Beads, Porcelain,
Nuts, and Ladies Underwear."

The Cornish men, (called 'Cousin Jacks' because they always had a cousin Jack who needed a job) were especially valued as miners owing to their wide experience in hardrock mining in their native land.

Telluride was a wide open, rip-roaring city. Saloons and gambling halls were open around the clock. Stores usually opened at 7 A.M, closing around 10 or 11 o'clock at night. Saturday night brought a flood of miners into town, the ink barely dry on their pay checks, ready to play as hard as they had worked. Cowhands, ranchers, and miners from Sawpit, Placerville, and Rico joined the Telluridians in these weekly

blow-outs. Raucous music spilled from saloon doors onto the streets; men crowded into gambling halls hoping to double their week's pay; dancing dandies piloted gaily dressed girls around dance floors; parlor houses, their tinkling pianos vying with high feminine laughter, welcomed the eager visitor to their dimly lit interiors. Laughter, singing, cursing, and on occasion, gun shots could be heard in the streets.

Both guns and tempers often exploded, and a man learned to be a "quick draw" as a matter of self defense. One man found his right hand suddenly thumbless one night in a Telluride saloon, when he attempted to pull a gun on a Rico sheriff. A bullet from the sheriff's revolver neatly severed this digit, just as the trouble maker was using it to cock his gun. A gun was a necessity in Telluride. As a deputy sheriff remarked after he was brought to trial and acquitted for shooting a man who killed a mine employee, "What did they mean in the testimony when they said I used my 'prerogative' as a deputy? Hell, man, I used my gun!"

One law officer, though, seemed to do pretty well without resorting to gun slinging. Jim Knous, 6 feet 5 inches tall, spotted trouble while tempers were still controllable and before fights got under way. Collaring the would-be antagonists, he would rough them up a bit and send them home. This method of law enforcement was so effective that the city treasury began to suffer from a lack of fines. The city council fired Knous for not making enough arrests.

But all was not bullets and brawling. Telluride had its more genteel side, both socially and geographically. Colorado Avenue was the dividing line, and a "lady" never allowed herself to venture south of that street.

The social scene in winter included "at home" days once a month, when Telluride homemakers opened their parlors to visitors. Cotillions and theater parties were occasionally held, with Telluride citizens turning out in white tie and formal gowns. An important yearly event was the Mule Skinners'

Ball. One year the invitations to this affair were printed on miniature canvas mule pack bags, and read:

"Yourself and Ladies are invited
to attend the Mule Skinners Ball
at the Opera House
Telluride, Colorado, May 10, 1911."

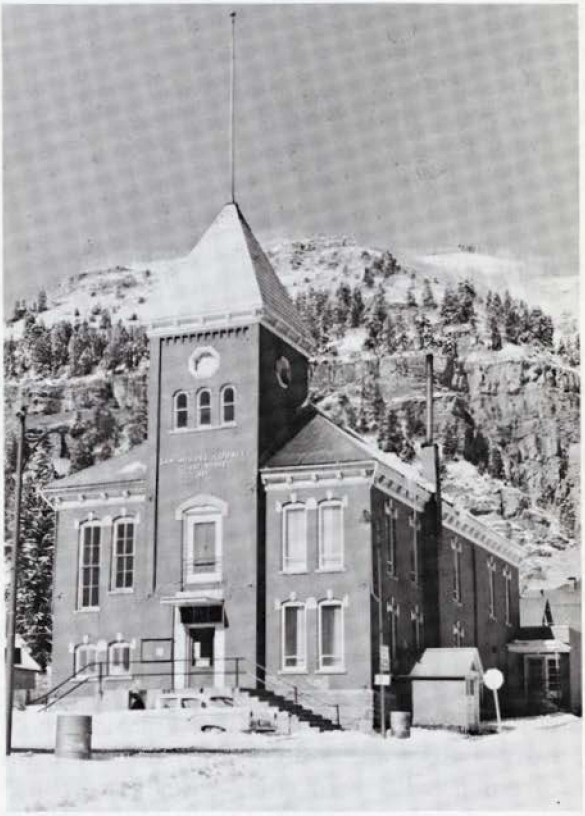
At Christmas time, community activities included programs put on by school, church, and other organizations. Proud mothers and bored fathers watched their stammering offspring perform in endless pageants, recitations, and tableaus. After each program, chairs were rearranged with bustling efficiency around the glowing tree to await Santa Claus, who arrived amid much bluster and commotion with goodies for each starry-eyed child.

Ice skating and tobogganing were popular pastimes. Skiing was considered more a means of transportation than a sport. A more novel means of transportation was the scoop shovel. Miners often used their broad scoop shovels to slide down to town from work. Seated on the scoop of their shovels, and holding the shovel handles up between their legs, they would streak down the mountains on the snow in these improvised one-man toboggans.

The big event of the summer was the fourth of July celebration, which lasted several boisterous days. This fireworks and flag festival was kicked off by a colorful parade of marching miners, fraternal orders, the sheriff's posse, fire engines, wagons decorated with flowers, evergreens, and pretty girls, all led by Telluride's Silver Cornet Band. There were ball games, foot races, horse races, a rodeo, and Indian dances. Hose teams, with firemen who sent each other sprawling with high pressure streams of water, contested for prizes. The most popular events were the drilling contests. These were held in the center of town, where a ten ton block of granite was placed in the middle of the street. Two men, one holding the steel drill, the other wielding the sledgehammer, would go to work on the rock. The team drilling the deepest hole in a given amount of time won the contest. Naked to the waist, and sweating with

effort, the men were cheered on by bystanders who bet on their favorites.

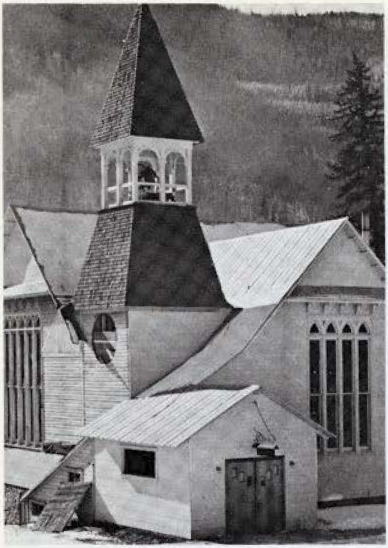
There were also diversions from the outside world, such as travelling circuses, theater companies, revival meetings, minstrel, medicine, and tent shows.

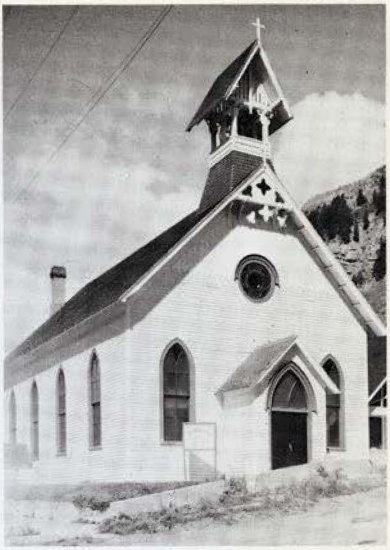


San Miguel County's handsome court house, built in 1887, is still being used. (Homer Reid Collection)

The Colorado House, one of Telluride's first hotels. (Flora Good Collection)

Looking south into the red-light district from the Brunswick Saloon, corner of Spruce and Colorado Avenue. (Homer Reid Collection)





The Presbyterian Church and St. Patrick's Catholic Church illustrate the simple white frame architecture favored by early day church builders.

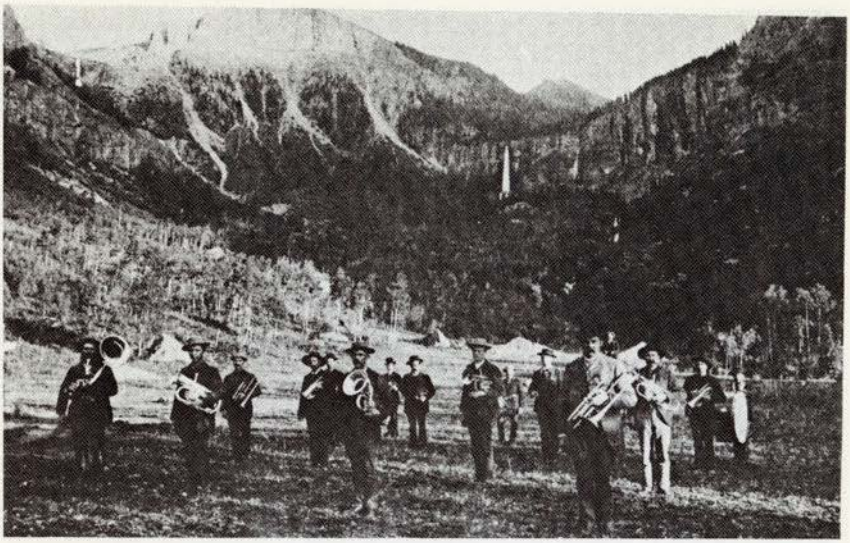
Hardware store bulges with merchandise. National guardsmen in foreground helped keep order during 1903 strike. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

Once a hospital, then a post office, and now a dormitory for skiers. (Flora Good Collection)

Office of the San Miguel Examiner. The paper was published weekly from 1881 to 1929. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

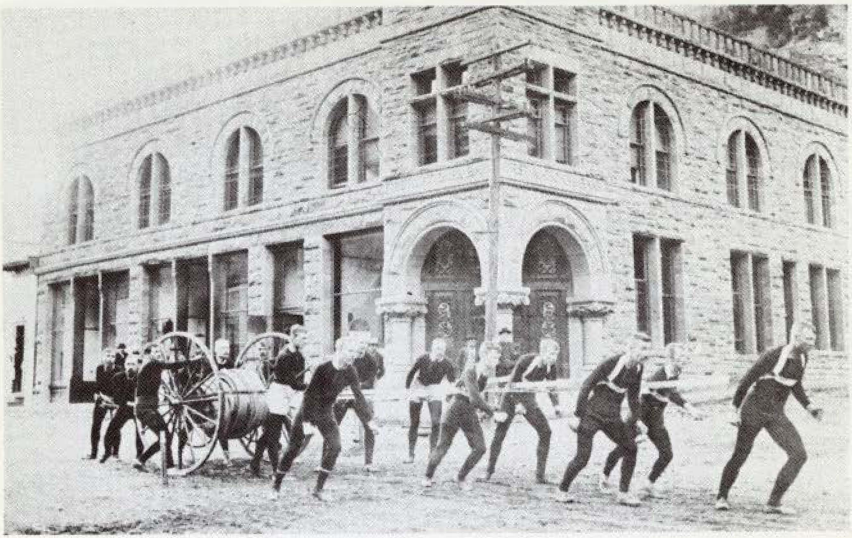
The "Telluride Symphony", composed of a violinist, trumpeter and harpist, inflict a bit of culture on indifferent saloon patrons. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

"See what the boys in the back room will have." The interior of the Cosmopolitan Saloon and Gambling Club is typical of such establishments in early day Telluride. Brass foot rail and polished brass spitoons add a note of "class" to the decor. (Homer Reid Collection)

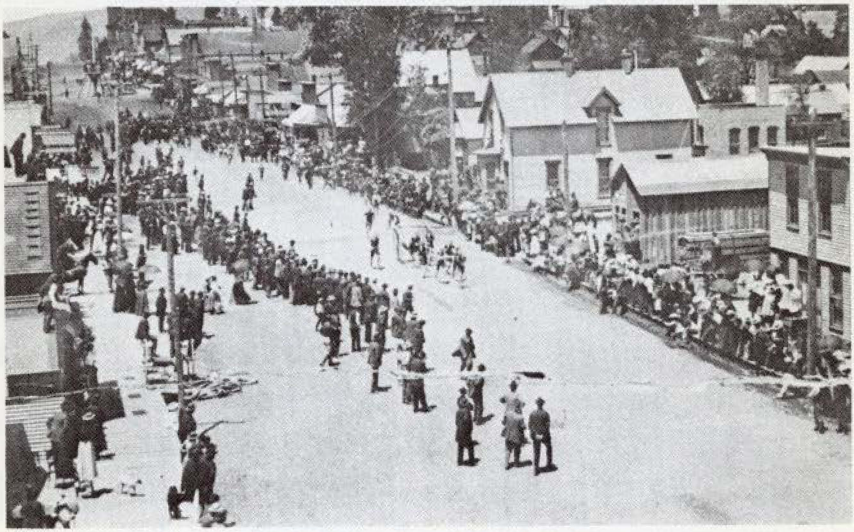


The Telluride Silver Cornet Band made the mountains ring with music in 1896. Bridal Veil Falls in the background. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

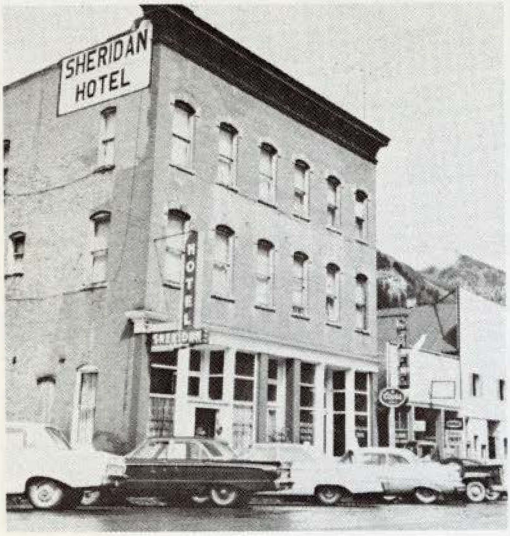
Hardworking members of the 1911 committee in charge of the annual Mule Skinners' Ball dutifully check on the quality of refreshments they plan to serve. (Homer Reid Collection)

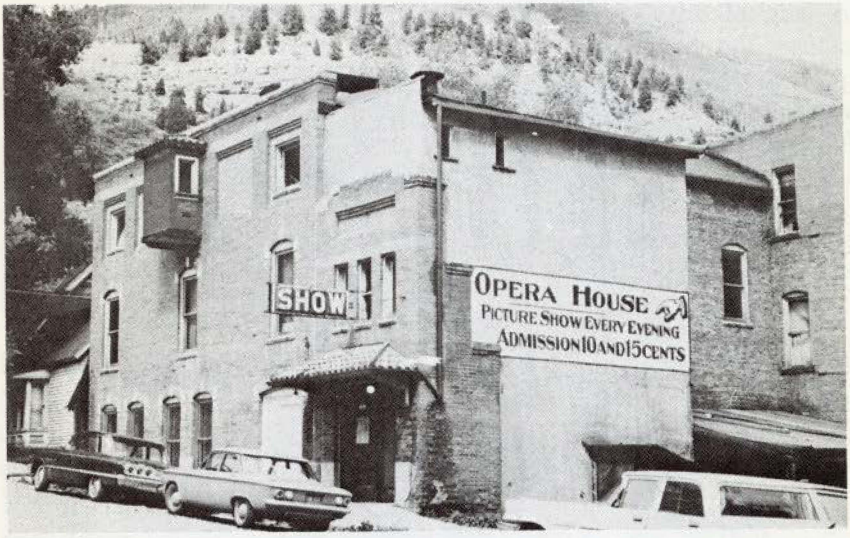


Telluride Hose Team No. 1, fearless champions of a Southwestern Colorado contest held in 1892. The First National Bank is in the background. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)



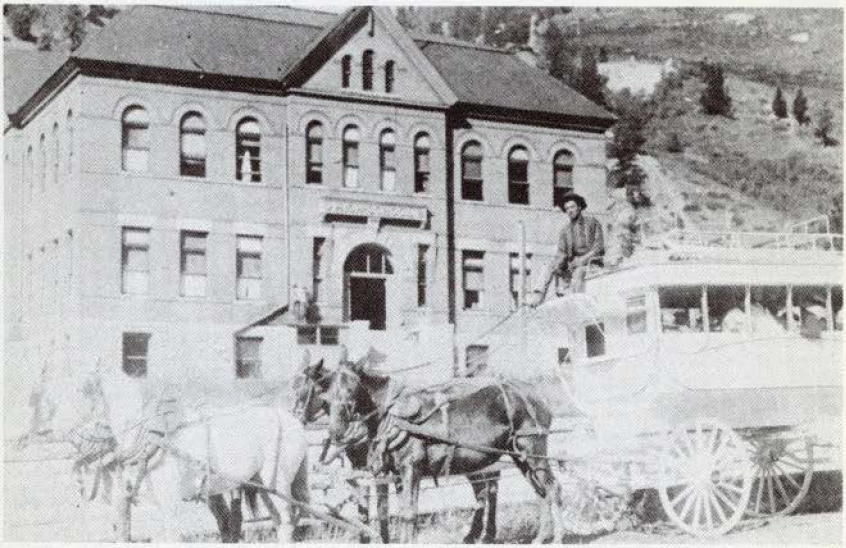
Spectators line Colorado Avenue to cheer the fire department's hose team race at 4th of July celebration in 1898. (Homer Reid collection)





The Sheridan Hotel's drab exterior belied its impressive interior. It was built in 1895, and is still in operation. The 200 seat Opera House, used for travelling shows in the boom years, is connected to the Sheridan by an enclosed walkway. It was built in 1914, and is now used as a movie theater. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

"You shall not press down upon the brow of labour this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." William Jennings Bryan speaks against repeal of the Sherman Act, July 4, 1903, in front of Sheridan Hotel. (Flora Good Collection)



Busing, frontier style. Students from Pandora were staged to and from Telluride High School by mule power. (Homer Reid Collection)

FROM TRAILS TO RAILS

At first, the miners' biggest headache was transportation. It was easier to get the ore out of the mines than it was to get it to the market. Secluded in the high Rocky Mountains, Telluride was practically cut off from the rest of the world. Roads were nonexistent, and the ore had to be packed out over hazardous trails by burro to Ouray, where it was loaded on wagons for shipment to the Alamosa railhead some 200 miles away.

A much nearer shipping point for Telluride's ore was provided when the Denver and Rio Grande built a railroad to Montrose in 1882. The wagon roads between the mining camp and Montrose became clogged with traffic, and ponderous ore and supply wagons, pulled by straining horses, mules, or ox teams, jolted over their rough and dusty sixty mile lengths. The whiplashed air along the routes was peppered with language only a mule or mule skinner could take.

Dave Wood's Freight Line was one of the largest of Telluride's transporters. His own wagon road cut across Horsefly Mesa between Telluride and Montrose. Wood's big wagons were pulled by ox teams, and their canvas covers were emblazoned with the legend: "DAVE WOOD, MAGNOLIA ROUTE."

Another road from Telluride to Montrose ran along the east side of the Uncompahgre River via Ridgway. A stage trip over this route took two bone battering days.

While the arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad at Ridgway did help some, the camp's transportation problem was not fully solved until Otto Mears, the famous "Pathfinder of the San Juans," built his Rio Grande Southern from there to Telluride in 1890.

Most of Telluride's proud population converged at the station to hail the arrival of the first passenger train. As the little narrow gauge chugged to a stop, a cheer exploded from the platform, and everybody climbed on board to admire the

red plush seats and to luxuriate in the fresh varnish smell and rich polished brass of the elegant parlor cars. Now remote little Telluride was laced to the rest of Colorado by rails -- only a day and a night from Denver!

The coming of the Rio Grande Southern boosted Telluride's economy, and the population soon jumped to some 5,000. Later, the rail line was extended to Durango. Telluride, being in a strategic position along the 160 mile route, became an important shipping center.

The Rio Grande Southern wound its way through some of the most magnificent scenery in the country. A ride on the Southern was, in fact, breath-taking in more ways than one. The road was almost as frightening as it was beautiful. Rails hung on narrow shelves hundreds of feet above rugged canyons. Deep gorges were crossed and crossed again by lattice-like wooden trestles.

After riding over the famous Ophir Loop, Otto Mears ordered a horse to take him back to Telluride. He declared, with some feeling, that no man in his right mind would risk riding over those rails!

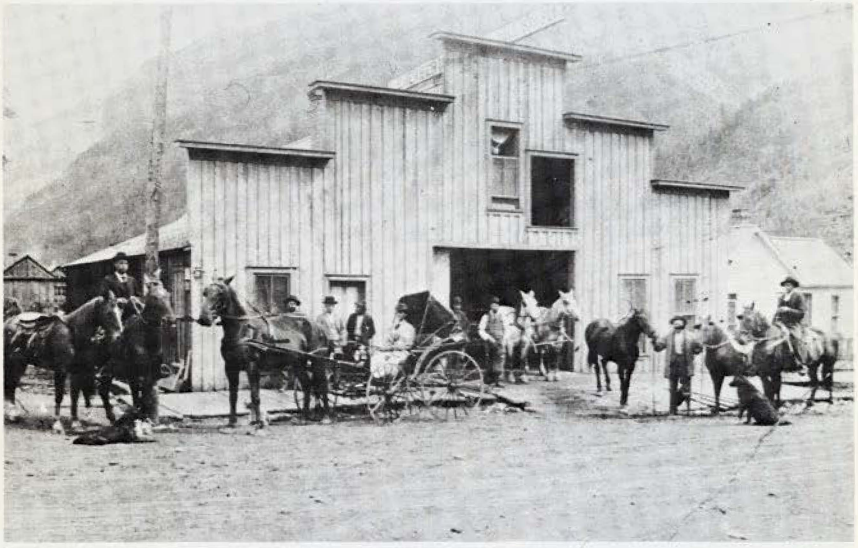
The Southern's passenger trains followed an erratic timetable. Unscheduled stops were common, and steep grades slowed its progress. By the time the train pulled into the station and the conductor bellowed out his customary "To-HELL-You-Ride!" the passengers had long since resigned themselves to a late arrival.

The silver panic of '93 drastically reduced the freighting business, and brought the Rio Grande Southern dangerously near its final run. The little railroad went into bankruptcy, and the Denver and Rio Grande took over with 70% of the Southern's stock under its control.

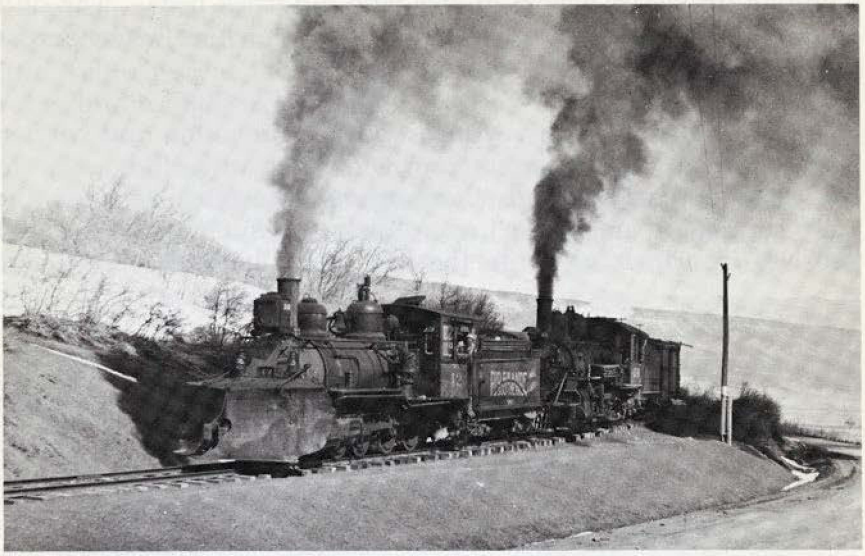
But in spite of the panic and the hardships of frequent track washouts, the Rio Grande Southern kept right on rolling until 1951. During the last two decades of its operation, the neat little steam trains were replaced with wacky looking contraptions called Galloping Geese. These were combinations of

Cadillac or Pierce Arrow bodies with old truck beds. The odd looking half-breeds, complete with cow catchers wired across the front fenders, were set on railroad wheels.

The incredible conveyances burned gasoline and carried both freight and passengers over the entire Ridgeway to Durango route. Though these geese were often derailed, the only injury a passenger was likely to suffer was strained muscles from helping to get the ugly things back on the tracks.

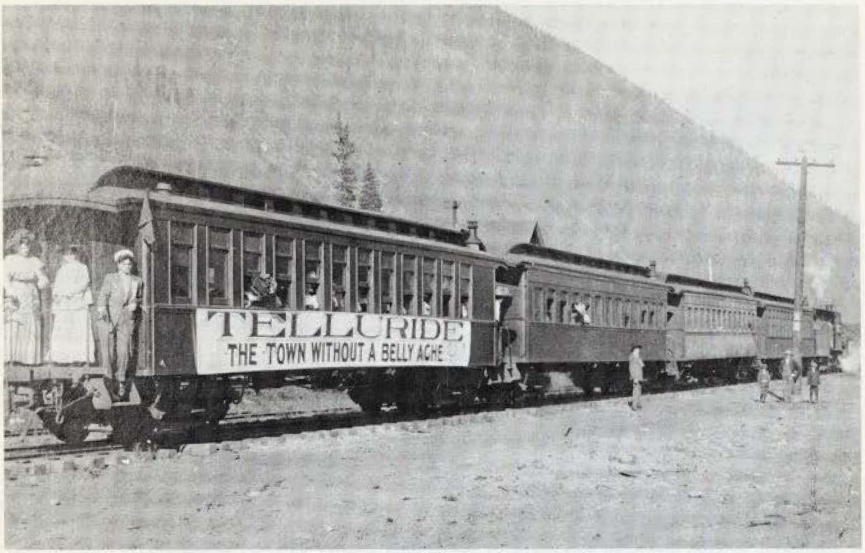


Early day livery stables did a brisk business in horse, wagon, and buggy rentals. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)



Double locomotives chug along the Rio Grande Southern Railroad on the Dallas Divide, elevation, 9,000 feet. (Flora Good Collection)

Telluride's little railroad station handled big business. One hundred and fifty cars of ore concentrate were shipped out every month during the 1890's. (Homer Reid Collection)



Telluride told the country about itself, as the Rio Grande Southern snaked its way from town to town. (Homer Reid Collection)

Some of the most dramatic scenery in the West was crossed by the Rio Grande Southern between Telluride and Rico. (Flora Good Collection)

Galloping Goose on famous Ophir Loop. Insert shows one of the Geese now on display on Colorado Avenue, next to the courthouse. (Flora Good Collection. Insert photo by Leland Feitz)

WAR FOR WAGES

As Telluride's population increased, so did its troubles. Labor strikes in 1901 and 1903 divided the town into opposing camps, and brought violence and sudden death to many of its people.

The first strike was called by miners protesting a new contract system that would have resulted in more work for less pay. Organizing a militant group of 250, the irate miners encountered their non-union replacements during a shift change at the Smuggler-Union.

A savage free-for-all ensued. Three men were killed and six severely wounded. The "scabs" were run out of town over 13,000 foot Imogene Pass to Ouray by the victorious union men, and the strike was settled in favor of the union.

The strike left a simmering residue of unrest and hostility in Telluride. The next year, the manager of the Smuggler-Union was shot. Dashing Bulkeley Wells was appointed the new manager, a position he held for 23 years. A Harvard man of epicurean tastes, his elegant life style contrasted sharply with the rough and ready atmosphere of the frontier.

The second strike was started by 100 union men who walked off their jobs at the Tomboy Mine to protest the hiring of non-union men at the mine's mill. The Colorado National Guard was sent in at the urgent request of the Mine Owners' Association. About 500 men, under the command of Maj. Z. T. Hill, descended on Telluride, and the mines immediately reopened with non-union labor, and the union men were deported.

The town was put under strict military supervision. A curfew was set, saloons and parlor houses were closed, identification passes issued, censorship passed, and Telluride became partially paralyzed. Even the Women's Christian Temperance Union had to ask permission to hold its annual ball.

On February 21, 1904, Bulkeley Wells, a member of the Colorado National Guard, took over command from Major

Hill, and the troops were recalled. But trouble continued to brew, and a Citizens' Alliance, including mine owners, was formed under Well's leadership. It rounded up several groups of union workers and sympathizers, and shipped them out of town. In retaliation, the Western Federation of Miners leased an abandoned mine at Red Mountain, armed the strikers and drilled them in warfare in preparation for further confrontations.

Sympathy for the miners grew. A photograph of Henry Maki, a Federation member, arrested for vagrancy by the militia, caused general public outrage. The man was pictured chained to a telephone pole. The caption read, "Is Colorado in America?"

Again the National Guard was sent in and put under the command of Wells. Rigid martial law returned to Telluride, and after several months of dissension, the final victory went to the mine owners.

Bulkeley Wells' leadership in the strife earned him the lasting enmity of the mine workers. He nearly lost his life one night when a bomb exploded under his bed. Blasted through the window by the explosion, Wells landed in the yard in a storm of flying debris. He escaped this "rude awakening" with only minor injuries.

Snowfall in Telluride averages 300 inches annually. The lowest temperature ever recorded was 37° belowzero; the highest, 96°. (Flora Good Collection)

NATURE'S TANTRUMS

Telluride lies in a narrow valley, walled in on three sides by sheer cliffs and soaring peaks. Before ways to control snowslides were developed, the craggy mountain heights bred danger. Snow, drifting in layer upon layer, became so heavy, it broke off in huge chunks, and boomed down the mountain side, snapping off spruce trees and gathering huge boulders as it gained momentum. Its thunderous roar echoed through the mountains and created concussions that sometimes shattered windows in the valley below.

Such a slide demolished part of the Liberty Bell Mine in 1902, killing seven men and injuring several more. While recovering the seven bodies, the rescue party was hit by a second slide. No one was hurt. However, on their way back to Telluride, carrying the dead and injured on makeshift sleds, the party was struck by a third slide, which killed three and injured five.

Then there were the freak accidents. A baby in an upstairs room escaped with only a slight scratch on its cheek, while two women on the first floor were killed when a slide rammed into their house. A man was once knocked unconscious and buried in the snow. His head was in a crevice, so he was able to breathe until he was rescued.

In Rico, a camp south of Telluride, a drunk slept through an avalanche, and realized what had happened only when he awoke and found himself looking at the stars. The slide had gently pushed the bed, complete with sleeping reveller, outside his partially destroyed cabin.

The winter of 1905-06 was an unusually heavy avalanche season. One hundred people perished. Months passed before the bodies were recovered from their snowy graves. A heartsick Telluride closed down all businesses to attend funerals. Ouray's newspaper, **The Solid Muldoon,** summed it up dramatically with the headline: THE WHITE DEATH DEALS DEATH AND DESTRUCTION IN EVERY QUARTER.

Summer was a little kinder, though electrical storms sometimes resulted in tragedy. Three miners at work in the Liberty Bell Mine were electrocuted when a bolt of lightning struck a rail of the track leading into the tunnel.

In 1909, a heavy cloudburst washed out much of the railroad between Telluride and Ridgway. Knowing it would be at least two months before the damaged track could be repaired, the people of Telluride sent French Alec and his mule string to Ridgway for supplies. To the chagrin of some and delight of others, the mule train straggled back ten days later with nothing but 15 kegs of beer strapped to each animal!

When, in 1914, heavy rains caused Cornet Creek to overflow, Telluride's streets were buried under a sea of mud and rocks. Up to eight feet of mud surged through some of the stores on Colorado Avenue, and one man was killed.

Flash floods could turn Telluride's streets into rivers of mud and rocks in a matter of minutes. (Homer Reid Collection)

CITY LIGHTS

In the late 1880's mine machinery began to be powered electrically, using the then new system of alternating current, saving thousands of dollars in operating costs. Electrical power was carried over Imogene pass by the highest transmission line in North America. Telluride became one of the best lighted cities in the world.

All this was due to a man considered by the Telluride citizenry to be of little importance, until his achievements commanded their respect. It may have been that in an area where men were admired for their physical prowess, brawn, and self assurance, L. L. Nunn seemed insignificant by comparison. He was only 5' 1" tall and weighed 115 pounds.

Nunn drifted into Telluride in 1881, and worked at various odd jobs. By studying law at home after work, he managed to be admitted to the Colorado bar.

When Nunn became legal advisor for the Gold King mine in 1888, the cost of steam power for running the mine machinery was around $2,500 a month. He believed this cost could be reduced by using alternating current, and the idea was discussed with George Westinghouse. Westinghouse, who was working at that time with the famous inventor of the alternating current system, Nikola Tesla, was delighted to have a chance to test Tesla's theory, which many electrical scientists ridiculed as being impractical for long distances. Westinghouse built a small primitive single phase generator to try out at Telluride.

Nunn installed the generator in a small power plant at Ames, near Ophir, and the cost of operating the Gold King's machinery dropped to $500.00 a month!

He ran an eight mile transmission line to Telluride from Ophir, and his line over Imogene Pass powered the Camp Bird Mine and other mines near Ouray. Thus, the first long distance alternating current system in the world was used to light the city, and power the surrounding mines.

Viewed from a high ski trail, Telluride takes on the charm of a toy village. (Photo courtesy of The Telluride Company)

THE SCENE TODAY

"Young" is the word for Telluride today. Where once prospectors and miners swarmed into the district seeking silver and gold, the "now" generation has converged on the town lured by the ski resort begun by California millionaire, Joseph T. Zoline. But it's not only the snow that brings them. These bright creative young people hail from both coasts, and have become year-around residents to escape the smog and tensions of city life. Talented in arts and crafts, they have refurbished the old buildings along Colorado Avenue and have established unique shops, supplying both locals and tourists with sports gear, antiques, art, gifts, books, fashion, and specialties of all kinds. Over 26 restaurants serve everything from pizza to French cuisine.

In 1987, Mountain Village Resort was established a short drive southeast of Telluride. Lodges, restaurants and a 177 room luxury hotel accommodate tourists and residents. A $9,000,000.00 gondola is being built to transport passengers over Coonskin Ridge from Telluride to Mountain Village.

Telluride has become a year-around tourist destination, buzzing with activity summer and winter. Hiking, golf, biking, fishing, and rafting draw the sports enthusiasts. Almost daily, festivals celebrate dancing, music, poetry and theater. Everything from the Beer Festival on Main Street to Shakespeare-in-the-Park, attests to the variety offered. There are balloon rides, hang gliding, and bicycle races. These festivals have earned Telluride the designation of "Festival Capital of Colorado."

The two largest events are the Blue Grass and Film Festivals. The first Film Festival was held in 1974 at the Sheridan Opera House and a local bar. From this humble beginning it has grown to an international gathering, requiring five theaters and one open-air cinema to scheduled programs, which includes premiers, experimental films and retrospectives, archive treasures, and three major tributes. USA TODAY described the programs as "the creme de la creme."

The Telluride Blue Grass Festival began in Telluride in 1973, and has grown to a yearly gathering of the top Blue Grass musicians in the country. Thousands of fans descend on Telluride every June to revel in 10 hours of music a day for the four-day festival.

An air of excitement and expectation, which must equal that felt by early day prospectors, pervades the town. A visitor, not familiar with true western hospitality, may be startled at first to be greeted on the street by a "hi," "hello," or "howdy," from almost every passerby, but soon becomes infected with the friendly atmosphere and begins to initiate a few "howdys" himself.

There are around 1300 permanent residents in Telluride (exclusive of dogs—everyone in town seems to own one). People find a haven of beauty and freedom in the seclusion of a town embraced by towering mountains sparkling with waterfalls in summer and snow in winter. The 365 foot Bridal Veil Falls drops down the cliffs just east of Telluride, with Ingram Falls flashing in the distance to the north. There is no more awesome scenery in Colorado than that around Telluride.

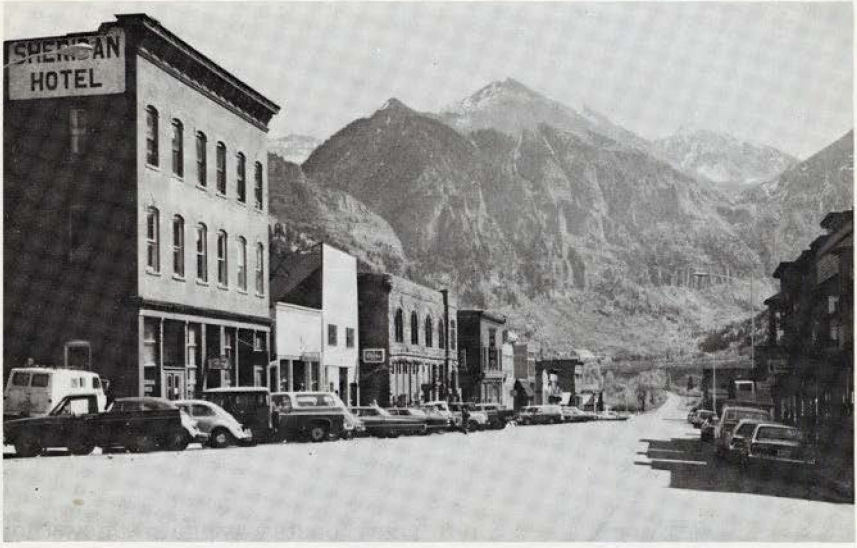
The ski complex, tourism, and a booming real estate market have replaced the Idarado Mining Company as the backbone of the economy. Luxury condominiums, expensive homes, lodges, and bed and breakfast accommodations have blossomed in the area. Upgraded Victorian homes sell for $500,000.00 or more. The town is served by a radio station, two newspapers, the weekly TELLURIDE TIMES JOURNAL and the DAILY PLANET.

Almost hourly flights from Denver bring visitors from nearly everywhere in the world to the Telluride Regional Airport, the highest commercial airport in North America at 9080 feet above sea level.

The ski area comprises 1050 acres of skiable terrain, 62 trails, and 3,522 feet of vertical drop. There are six double and two triple chair lifts, one high speed quad, and one poma lift.

Because of land use controls, zoning, and careful renovation, the distinctive aura of early mining days lingers still. With an average annual snowfall of 300 inches, Telluride is on its way again. Snow, the vicious villian of the past, has become the hero of today.

Winter Telluride at the foot of Ajax, Telluride, and Ingram Peaks. (Photo courtesy of The Telluride Company)



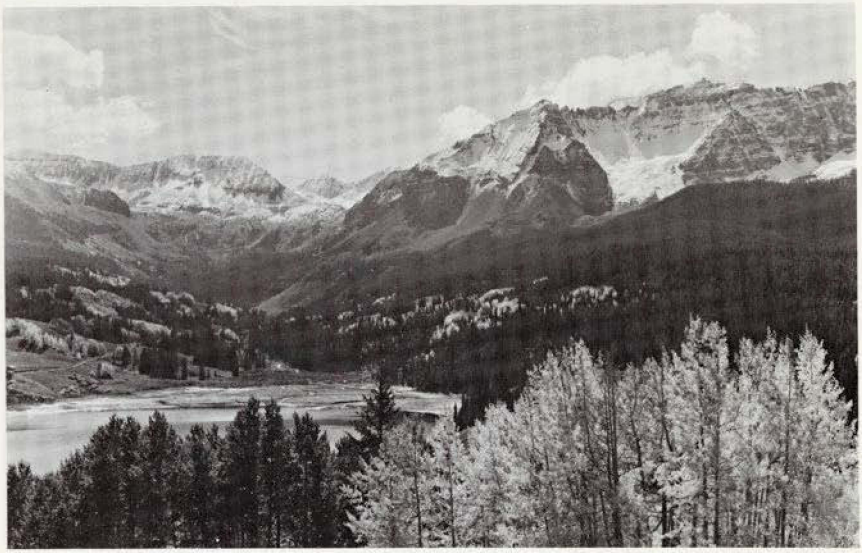
Cars line Colorado Avenue where mule trains and freight wagons once filled the street. (Photo by Larry Wilkinson)

The Senate, an early day "bawdy house" is now a respectable place, where diners can enjoy the delicious food and interesting decor typical of Telluride's fine restaurants. (Photo by Larry Wilkinson)

Repaired Pacific Street cribs help ease today's housing shortage.
(Photo by Larry Wilkinson)

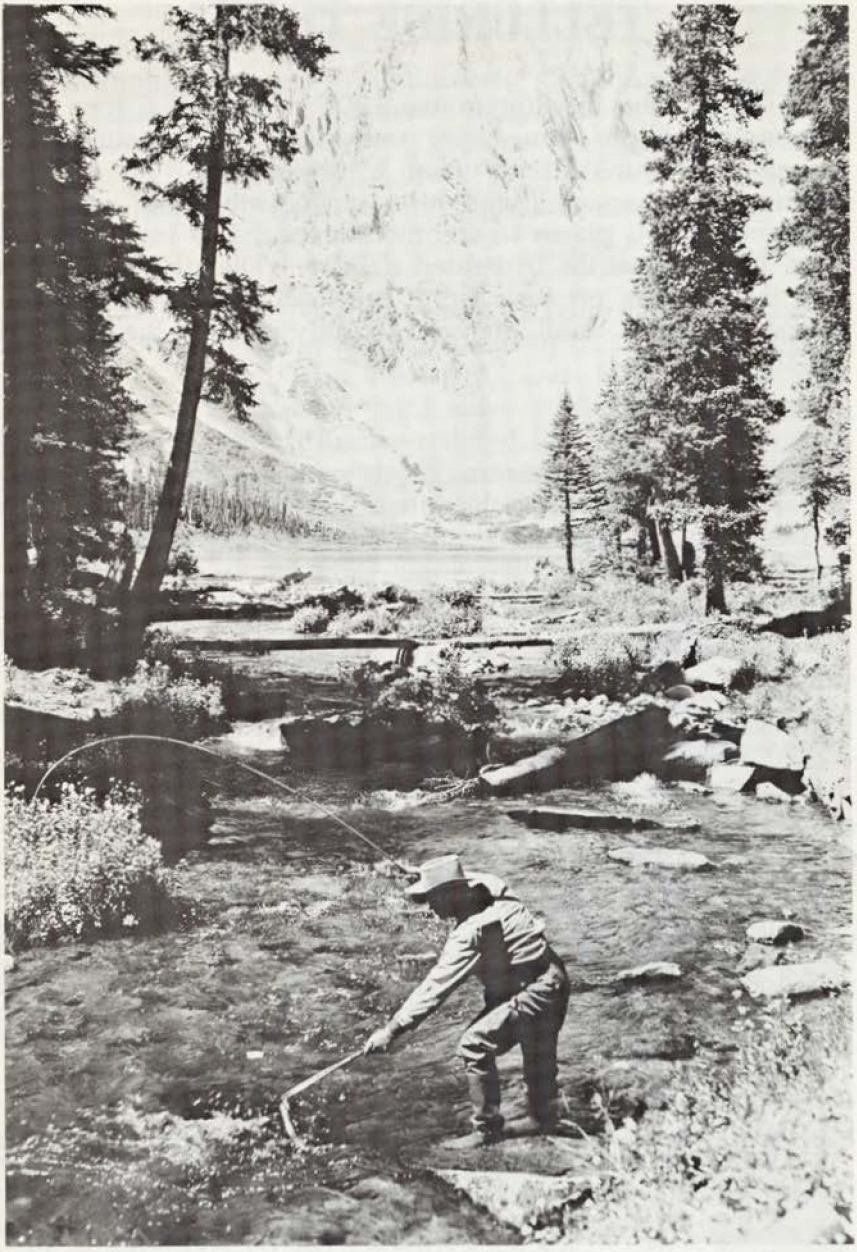
Alta mine, located a few miles southwest of Telluride, with Lizard Head (left) and Wilson peaks in the background. One of the delights of the area is exploring ghost towns. (Colorado Dept. of Public Relations)

Mt. Sneffles, elevation 14,150 feet, lies about four miles north of Telluride. (Colorado Department of Public Relations)



Trout Lake, about twelve miles south of Telluride. Sheep Mountain in the background. (Colorado Department of Public Relations)

Alta Lake, showing left to right: Lizard Head Peak, Sunshine Peak, Mt. Wilson, Mt. Gladstone and Wilson Peak. (Colorado Department of Public Relations)



Trout fishermen find hours of satisfaction along the sparkling streams and crystal lakes in the Uncompahgre National Forest. (Colorado Department of Public Relations)

TELLURIDE TRIVIA

During the fighting in the 1901 strike, union men at the Smuggler-Union Mine were outwitted by a postman who rescued an injured "scab" from a mine tunnel. The mailman encased his trapped friend in a canvas mail bag, which had been cut in two places to accomodate the man's legs, and took him boldly past the frustrated strikers. The strikers itched to get their hands on their prey, but fearing arrest if they tampered with U.S. mail, they grudgingly allowed the "mail" to go through.

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Bulkley Wells' eastern guests made as much as $50,000 on visits to Telluride, when their host gave them short term leases on especially rich sections of the Smuggler-Union mine.

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Telluride women lined rough wooden boxes with white cambric, and covered the outside with black calico when coffins were needed. These homemade caskets were lowered into graves with harness reins.

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Jim Clark, once a member of the Jesse James gang, was hired as deputy marshal when he offered to put a stop to the activities of a bunch of gunmen who were keeping the good citizens of Telluride in a state of continual terror. Clark did a good job of keeping law and order in Telluride, but outside the city limits he disguised himself and reverted to his old James gang habits.

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The very first report made by the nervous new manager of a Telluride express company, who was unable to account for a lost burro shipped from Denver, read: "One 'burrueu' missing." Then, referring to himself, he sheepishly added, "One jackass on hand."

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The Rio Grande Southern's snail-like pace produced a standard Telluride train joke:

Pregnant passenger to conductor: "Can't this train go any faster? I'm about to have a baby."

Conductor: "Madam, you shouldn't have got on the train in such a condition."

Passenger: "I wasn't in this condition when I got on."

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The San Miguel National Bank of Telluride had the questionable honor of being the first bank to be robbed by Butch Cassidy. Cassidy, Tom McCarty, and Matt Warner, the notorious "wild bunch," rode into town the morning of June 24, 1889, and brazenly relieved the bank of a disputed amount of money, which some reports set at $30,000. Emerging with the loot, they vaulted into their saddles, and lost no time leaving town. The stolen money was never recovered.

There was an understandable reluctance on the part of the pursuing posse to overtake the Cassidy gang, whose skill with pistols was legendary. The only reward the posse got from its token chase was Butch Cassidy's horse, which was unable to keep up the grueling pace, and was discarded by the robbers who "borrowed" a replacement from a luckless farmer. Sheriff Beattie kept this animal to "pay my expenses of the chase," and delighted in riding around Telluride on the dappled brown horse for years afterwards.

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When a Telluride bank cashier named "Buck" left town, taking the bank's money, the depositors who lived in neighboring Rico, raised a banner across their main street that announced: "BUCK HAS GONE OVER THE HILL WITH THE DOE."

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Annoyed bulls sometimes charged the Rio Grande Southern's little narrow gauge train when it slowed down for range cattle to cross its track.

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"A SEEDY COUNTRY BANKER SWINDLES SIX NEW YORK BANKS OUT OF $500,000," read a **New York Times** headline of September, 1929. Charles D. Waggoner, president

of the Bank of Telluride, had anticipated that his bank would soon be closed, along with others in the nation, in the crash of '29. He worried about the hard working miners whose life savings would be lost, and decided upon desperate action.

By a complicated series of illegal transactions, he manipulated his bank's assets at the expense of the New York banks, even though he realized he would be arrested. The depositors in the Bank of Telluride were hard put to deplore this lawless action, since not one of them lost a cent when the bank was closed.

Ralph L. Brown, in his book, **An Empire of Silver**, says of Waggoner, "He is still well remembered in San Miguel County, and was often called the 'Robin Hood of the San Juans.' Contemporary accounts do not reveal what he was called in New York."

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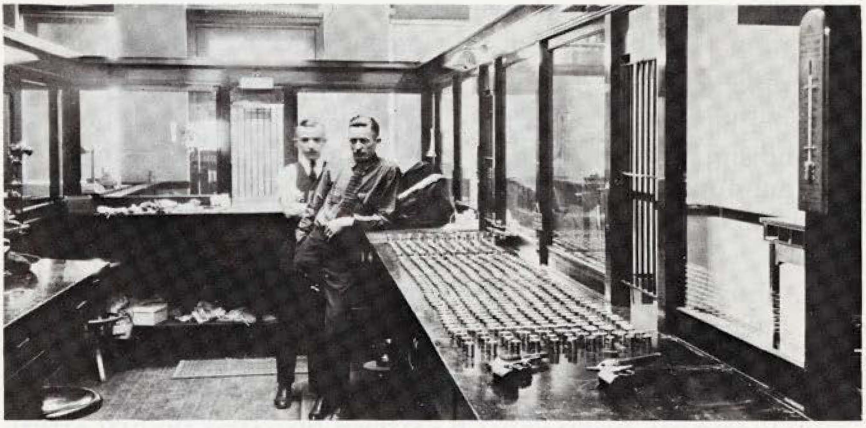
Dave Wood, tough owner of a freight line, did a little prospecting on the side. He was a firm believer in the power of a "divining rod," which he used in his efforts to search out ore deposits. He once fired an employee for making so much noise that the "spirits" controlling this "spook stick" were frightened away.



Banker Charles D. Waggoner (left) who swindled Wall Street to save his depositors' accounts, shows off coins, part of the $175,000 on deposit in The Bank of Telluride during its solvent days. (Denver Public Library Western Collection)

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The Durango Herald

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Colorado Magazine

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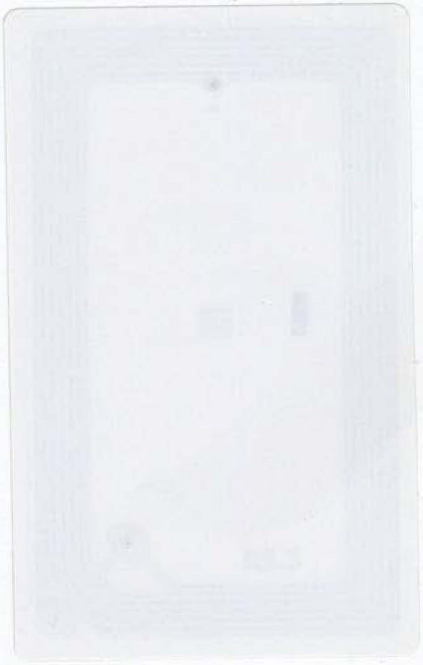
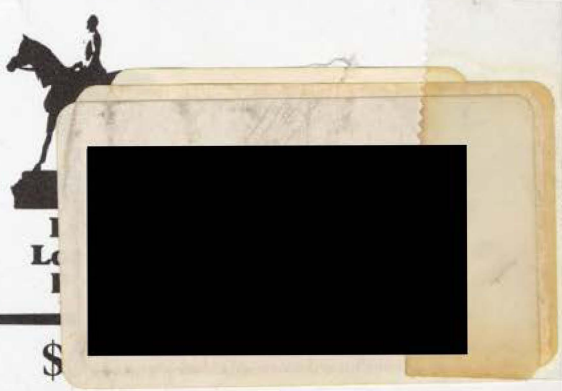
Mrs. Weber lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Her interest in the San Juan Country developed from the annual vacations she has taken there with her family over the years. This history of Telluride is her first writing about her native state.



Telluride's Best Selling Book Since 1974

"It is not probable you will find a people so thoroughly contented and prosperous as in Telluride nor a place where you will be more welcome as a resident or visitor."

Resources and Mineral Wealth of San Miguel County, 1894.